

Thomas Starbuck Homestead
11 Milk Street
Nantucket
Nantucket County
Massachusetts

HABS No. MASS-942

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PHOTOGRAPHS
WRITTEN HISTORICAL AND DESCRIPTIVE DATA

Historic American Building Survey
Office of Archeology and Historic Preservation
National Park Service
Department of the Interior
Washington, D. C. 20240

HISTORIC AMERICAN BUILDINGS SURVEY

HABS No. MASS-942

THOMAS STARBUCK HOMESTEAD

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Location: 11 Milk Street (on north side of Milk Street at east corner of Green Street), Nantucket, Massachusetts. 12-

Present Owners: George Walker Frost and Dorothy Elizabeth Walker Sykes -- subject to life right to Margaret Prentice.

Present Occupant: Miss Margaret Prentice

Present Use: Residence

Brief Statement of Significance: A typical Nantucket house, it retains many interesting, original and old features and was the home of the famous Starbuck family.

PART I. HISTORICAL INFORMATION

A. Physical History:

1. Original and subsequent owners:

1761 -- Thomas Starbuck built house near Capaum Pond. He died in 1777.

1790 -- Thomas Starbuck, his son, moved house to present site. He died in 1830. Eventually the property was inherited by Miss Elizabeth and Miss Rachel Swain, who were Starbuck descendants. They occupied it for many years.

1919 -- Eva J. Dyer purchased property at auction from heirs of the Misses Swain.

1920 -- Mary Elizabeth Walker bought from Eva J. Dyer.

1964 to date -- George Walker Frost and Dorothy Elizabeth Walker Sykes, nephew and niece of Mary Elizabeth Walker, inherited, subject to life right to Margaret Prentice.

(Abstract, Records Registry of Deeds, Nantucket, Mass.)

2. Date of erection: Probably about 1761, on the site of the Cornish Farm near Capaum Pond.

Thomas Starbuck married Rachel Allen that year, and records show he owned a large double house at that location, which

was moved in 1790 by his son, Thomas, to a location in the vicinity of "Green Street near the weaver shop of Ceeley." (Abstract, Records Nantucket Historical Association and Nantucket Vital Statistics)

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3. Architect: None
4. Original plans, construction, etc.: Erected as a large double house and divided into two houses when moved from Capaum area.

The room now used as a dining room was originally the kitchen. It contains one of the finest examples of early American fireplaces in New England. Beside the fireplace in a passageway is the chimney with a "gun closet" and a "blanket closet" set into the bricks where guns and blankets were kept dry. The fireplace has two ovens.

A fireplace of this size is unusual in the off-center design of a typical Nantucket house, as well as the fact that there are no back stairs. This may be because it is one-half of the original house.

There are "lights" over the doors from the former kitchen, and the passageway to the left of the fireplace leads to the small chamber or borning-room.

5. Notes on alterations and additions: The ell with its spacious kitchen was added in 1913.

In 1931 Miss Walker carefully restored the house, retaining all of its old characteristics while making it comfortable for modern living.

- B. Historical Events Connected with the Structure: House was built by Thomas Starbuck, the great-grandson of Edward Starbuck, the first of the Nantucket Starbucks who came to Nantucket in 1659. It was moved to its present location when the harbor at Capaum closed up and the town was relocated. Thomas Starbuck's grandmother, Mary (Coffin) Starbuck, was considered the ablest woman on the Island and was known as "The Great Mary". Her husband Nathaniel, as shown by his account books in the keeping of the Nantucket Historical Association, was a shrewd man. As early as 1705 he was paying for the "carting of blubber" and shipping sperm oil to regular customers in England.

In the borning room in this house in 1774 was born Joseph Starbuck, who became the richest whale oil merchant in Nantucket as well as the most famous of the Island shipbuilders. The story of his building the three brick houses for his three sons is told in Dr. Will Gardner's book, Three Bricks and Three Brothers.

The Starbuck clan was once concentrated around this area on Milk Street. Milk Street was an important thoroughfare and at its junction with Main Street on the southeast corner stood the

Town House, the meeting place for the Town Meetings of that day.

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Thomas Macy's cooper-shop a short distance away up Green Street in back of his home was the most important one on the Island. Here were made the curving staves, each fitted to its neighbor and ready for the cooper on board the whaleship to make them into casks as the crude sperm oil flowed from the try-works on the deck.

C. Sources of Information:

1. Old Views: Photograph of exterior and one of fireplace in Scrapbooks in Collection of Miss Grace Brown Gardner (microfilm in Nantucket Atheneum); recent photograph of house in Ninety-Five Percent Perfect by Everett U. Crosby; photographs and descriptions of house and cooper-shop in Three Bricks and Three Brothers by William Edward Cardner; photographs of exterior and interior in Old Houses on Nantucket by Kenneth Duprey.

2. Bibliography:

Duprey, Kenneth. Old Houses on Nantucket. New York: Architectural Book Publishing Co., 1959.

Cardner, William Edward. Three Bricks and Three Brothers; the Story of the Nantucket Whale-oil Merchant, Joseph Starbuck. Cambridge: Riverside Press, 1945.

Prepared by Mrs. Marie M. Coffin
Nantucket, Massachusetts
June, 1966

PART I. PROJECT INFORMATION

These records were prepared for the Historic American Buildings Survey project on Nantucket, Massachusetts. They are part of a continuing HABS comprehensive survey of the early architecture and urban design of Nantucket financed by a grant from the Nantucket Historical Trust.

The project was under the general supervision of James C. Massey, Chief of the Historic American Buildings Survey. Historical information was provided by Mrs. Marie M. Coffin of Nantucket, Massachusetts. Photographs are by Cortlandt V. D. Hubbard of Philadelphia, Pennsylvania. The material was edited for deposit in the Library of Congress by Mrs. Constance Werner Ramirez, August 1971.